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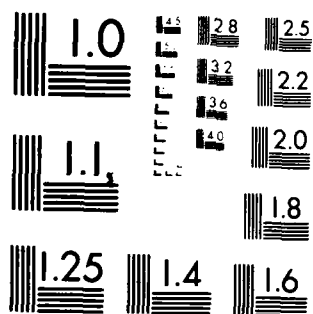
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STUDENT ESSAY

PSYCHOLOGIC ASPECTS OF TERRORISM

BY

COLONEL JOHN R. GALVIN

26 APRIL 1983

CORRESPONDING COURSE

US ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA



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PSYCHOLOGIC ASPECTS OF TERRORISM

By

Colonel John Robert Galvin
Medical Corps



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Increasing incidences of terrorist exploitation of sensitive political interfaces are occurring. Military and paramilitary commanders are likely to become involved in the resolution of incidents precipitated by such organizations. Personnel known to staff such organizations are examined in terms of background, educational and social factors. Special attention to the behavioral background reveals stunted development of parental identification and a lack of fulfillment of basic personality needs. Counterforce commanders should be aware that observed behavior such as championing an oppressed minority masks internal emotional dissonance and is an outlet for subconscious rage. Death threats and authoritarian tactics will tend to re-enforce the underlying process. Opportunities to ventilate and negotiations with (real or illusory) escape scenarios will provide optimal interventions to preserve hostages and to amass overwhelming counterforce.

PSYCHOLOGIC ASPECTS OF TERRORISM

Walter Lacquer defines a terrorist as one who wishes to "further his views...by... coercive intimidation."¹ An expanded definition includes, the identification with a cause and a group of individuals perceived as oppressed or disenfranchised. Terrorists recognize no sanctuaries of time, nor place. There is no such person as a non-combatant. Violence is directed in an arbitrary manner, for its purpose is to inflict emotional damage and fear. As Lenin said, "The purpose of terrorism is to terrorize."

On the basis of persistence and proliferation of all types of terrorist groups, bolstered by continuing evidence of intra-group cooperation, it is a certainty that further military-terrorist confrontations will occur. This paper examines known data concerning the groups in question, their background, education, age, and sex. Ideologic concepts; theoretical concepts, and motivation are discussed. (Methodologies of dealing with terrorists tactically and philosophically are explored.)

DESCRIPTION OF TERRORISTS

As a group, terrorists average 22-28 years. West German and Palestinian operatives are older, tending to the early thirties. Again, excepting Palestinian and West Germans, "combatants" are predominately male. Women are used in support, intelligence, and roles such as maintaining safe houses.

Educationally, members of these para-military units are highly trained in civilian occupations, frequently possessing advanced academic credentials. Ulrike Meinhof (Baader-Meinhof West Germany), had completed the qualifications for a doctorate in art history. George Habash (Popular Front

for the Liberation of Palestine), was a practicing physician. Yassir Arafat (Palestinian Liberation Organization) an engineer, Mahler (Baader-Meinhof), an attorney, Fusaro (Japanese Red Army) an insurance executive.

Politically stated aims of terrorists may vary from ultra right wing fascism, to extremes of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Religious themes (Irish Republican Army) may be embraced such as Catholic oppression or Muslim Unity (PLO). Intragroup unity consists in identifying with a cause and utilizing methods that are extra-legal and force which falls outside the boundaries of standard military organizations. An existential philosophy of destruction to catalyze growth is prevalent; end points are frequently vague and not held in totality by all members. At times, the existence of the organization seems to be an end point in itself. Marx and Lenin's views on structural growth of concepts by dismantling older, non-functional ideas. Class struggle is advocated.

Individually, the players in these dramas tend to the theatrical and bizarre in their life style and histories. Giacomo Feltrinelli (Italian Red Brigades) was an independent wealthy publisher. (Dr. Zhivago, The Leopard). Feltrinelli's childhood was impoverished; he was raised under the harsh discipline of a governess supervised, by a severe mother. Sexually impotent, he shunned the company of his peers, electing to associate with fanatics and illiterates. Originally a fascist, Feltrinelli turned his orientation to the extreme left; traveling to Cuba in an attempt to emulate Fidel Castro. Reportedly bankrolled by George Habash (PFLP), Feltrinelli died in a bizarre attempt to dynamite a power pylon near Milan - a victim of his own lack of experience with explosives.

Incidents of poorly coordinated and technically inept

ventures are not uncommon. A Baader-Meinof bank robbery resulted in the death of a police officer when the escape vehicle was parked illegally with two wheels on the curbing. This should not, however, be construed to indicate lack of murderous intent, nor the resolution to sacrifice self or others. Disorganization results from lack of group homogeneity and reflects dysfunction in thought processes to the participants.

Terrorist Personality

Personality structures of many terrorists have recurrent themes. Often they are the victim of "inadequate mothering", and the attendant rage this lack can create. The resulting anger is expressed in aggressive/destructive actions. Many of these individuals possess a cynical intelligence enabling them to recruit for their task and providing them with the understanding necessary to attack the systems they despise. Terroristic actions project outward the rage and internal dysphoria of the operators under the justification of aiding in oppressed minority group.

Potential Areas of Terrorist Military Conflict

Where might the military interface with terrorists? Almost anywhere. The Dozier Kidnapping (Italy 1982, Brig. Gen. Dozier NATO by Italian Red Brigades), had neither strategic nor tactical value, and was virtually disconnected from NATO functions. It did prove that the Red Brigades could successfully attack a senior United States military officer. The point is that an arbitrary victim was selected for kidnapping, and eventual execution in order to instill feelings of helplessness and panic. Likely military-terrorist clashes will result from four needs of the outlawed organizations; publicity, weapons, finances, and political leverage. The most feared scenario, of course,

is the capture or purchase of a thermo-nuclear device and threat of detonation of such a device.

What would such a scenario look like? Most probably a small group of participants 6 - 15, under age 35, mainly but not exclusively male; larger proportion of female operators in European groups excepting the Irish Republican Army. Ordinarily, such groups are not equipped with heavy weapons. Grenades and handguns will be plentiful. Training will vary from excellent to non-existent - accidental firings/detonations are not exceptional. Unless dealing with the IRA, educational levels will be high. Participants are dedicated, and any shortfall in training will be more than compensated by deadly intent. There will be no such person as an innocent bystander and capricious execution of hostages and/or individuals connected to the scene only by proximity may be expected. Contingency plans by the terrorists for safe conduct by aircraft to sanctuaries such as Libya may be presumed.

Areas Open to Exploitation by Counterforce

Frequently, subgroups subsumed within the general rubric of a single terrorist organization differ substantially in basic philosophy. Both Yassir Arafat (PLO) and George Habash (PFLP) are publicly dedicated to the establishment of an autonomous Palestinian state. Habash's tactics, particularly the widely held view that he planned the execution of the U.S. ambassador to Lebanon, Francis Meloy, Jr. and an aide in 1977², are out of phase with Arafat's attempt to install the PLO as a legitimated international political entity. There are, as well, individual exploitable differences within individual operational cells. It is important to bear in mind that terrorist incidents are intended to draw attention to themselves in order to dramatize their cause. Scenarios

are carefully chosen, consider the Mountbatten assassination, the Munich Olympics, the seizure of the OPEC ministers. The objective is to make the statement, emasculate the authorities and execute successfully a dangerous escape.

Underlying Psychodynamics of Terrorism

Jonas, in his review,³ considers a net result of inadequate parenting at early developmental stages to be the deciding factors in the terrorist personality.

Behavioral authorities (Perls, Sullivan, Rogers) agree that crucial formative stages in human psyche are ages 0 to two, preverbal and peri-adolescent 10 to 14.

It is the early years, 0 to two, that humans learn about the structure of their world. This is the stage when identification and bonding with parental figures occurs. Gestalt therapists postulate that absent or incomplete processes at this time, compel the individual to engage in maladaptive behavior in attempts to fill in missing life structures. That is, the deprived child and later adult will continue to search for satisfactory parenting and the accompanying love that such parenting could provide. This quest goes on at subconscious or incompletely conscious levels. Since the parenting needs are operant at a subliminal level, there is slim chance of their being adequately met. The "Gestalt" remains incomplete, frustration, maladaptation and rage may result. For example, unfinished parental needs may be displaced to a husband or wife. Since the spouse is not the parent, since the needy partner is unaware of the true nature of his (her) needs, there is minimal opportunity for satisfaction.

As Mulcahy comments in Sullivan's text,⁴

the directions and characteristics given to the self in infancy and childhood are maintained year after year, at an extra-

ordinary cost, so that most people in this culture, and presumably in any other, because of inadequate and unfortunate experience in early life, become inferior caricatures of what they might have been.

The end product of the unsuccessful search is psychic pain. In the framework of this discussion, the violence that terrorists do out reflects an attempt to alleviate internal (endopsychic) pain.

It is a known phenomenon that self-mutilating schizophrenics, in rational moments recall that the damage and agonizing discomfort they inflict on themselves, including self-castration and eye-gouging, can relieve the internal pain and discord in their minds. This correlates with the terrorist inflicting violence in bizarrely inappropriate fashions; however, others, not self are punished.

Again considering Ulrike Meino - a product of a disrupted childhood, fatherless at any early age and orphan at 11, she sought the company of radical thinkers. She had virtually completed a doctorate in art history; with her husband had achieved financial and critical success in publishing anti-establishment periodicals. Meino had written and produced a West German television play ("Bambule") and was the mother of twin daughters. She was apprehended and subsequently hung herself while a prisoner.

And again Feltrinelli, a millionaire publisher whose childhood was so impoverished, oscillating from extremes of political right and left, ultimately accidentally destroying himself in the process of striking out at the establishment's order.

In fact, these swings away from any established order are a predominate feature. Dualities of anarchism

and destructiveness are persuasive. To quote one of the terrorist's "sources":

It is certainly their situation which provokes this violence. But it only appears legitimate to them because it is anarchic. If it acquired the slightest political direction, they would begin to suspect it.⁶

Tactical Approaches to Terrorists

Presumptions: The force is armed, and organized, purposeful (in their own manner), resourceful, and committed. The terrorist force has in its possession or under its control objects or persons that are of value to the interests of the opposing force. Commanders should realize that, in the context, violent death to a terrorist will glorify him (her) as a martyr, dramatize the cause, and may be a barely subconscious outcome and provide relief from inner pain and dissonance.

Options

(1) An overwhelming assault early on: This requires a trained, rapidly deployable force. Since property and lives are likely to be lost, this virtually limits actions to home forces (SAS in England), rapidly mounted clandestine forces disguised as home forces, or forces acting in contravention of international law (Entebbe). Beyond 18-24 hours, such operations become increasingly difficult, since secrecy is a severe handicap in our society and media coverage escalates and enlists public sympathy for hostages and terrorists, as well as making it obvious that some of the target group are female.

(2) Negotiation - frequently the demands are unrealistic, including the freedom of large numbers of "political" prisoners, actions which transcend national borders and

interests. Remember, the commander is dealing with sophisticated, well-educated, and informed people.

In one sense, time favors the authorities. Terrorist operations lack the capacity for sustained support and logistics. Time tends also to provoke frustration and to facilitate intergroup rivalry and conflict. Unhappily, time also tends to increase the incidence of hostage execution, and the price of their survival. The commander, and his representatives, must realize that the scenario in progress meets deeply embedded psychologic needs and that authority figures may be misperceived as the missing loved/hated parent; with violent response. Negotiations should emanate from position of strength and security. Anti-terrorists reaction to tactics such as hostage execution must not appear to be frantic or disorganized; the opposing commander cannot allow himself or his force to be terrorized. Successful negotiations should center around allowing the world to hear the terrorist's aims and incorporate the possibility of escape (factitious or not) to the besieged.

Conclusions

United States national interest will continue to be threatened by terrorist activities. Such activities may be a direct threat to U.S. life and property or a threat to international and allied stability such as seizure or creation of a nuclear weapon. Forces and organizations must be available to gather intelligence and predict likely or imminent incidents, and to intervene decisively in pursuit of U.S. interests.

Planning and training of a rapid reaction force should continue. Immediately available air deployment assets must be designated to transport this force. Familiarization training in the recognition and initial reaction to terrorism must

be designed and become part of all commanders' military skill armamentarium. Commanders in sensitive areas such as NATO, and the Middle East must be aware of problems particular to their operational areas. Intelligence gathering and analyzing agencies in military and State Department assignments must also be made aware of their role in early detection and prevention.

FOOTNOTES

1. Walter Laquer, Terrorism, p. 6.
2. "Beirut Doctor's Death", Newsweek, 1 January 1979, p. 13.
3. Jonas Adolfe, "Terrorism", in Terrorism, vol. 5, p. 13.
4. Harry S. Sullivan (Mulcahy's comments) Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry, p. 267.
5. Harry S. Sullivan, Conceptions of Modern Psychiatry, p. 56.
6. Jean Paul Satre, Between Existentialism and Marxism, p. 24.

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